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FRANCES ELIZABETH WILLARD.

BY LADY HENRY SOMERSET, ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD'S
WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION.

It is difficult sometimes to gauge, as we turn the pages of current history, what are the events and which are the lives that are making an indelible mark on our day. Only from time to time when some crisis arrests our thought do we begin to disentangle from the multitude of current events those salient features that stand out as special landmarks. I believe that when the record of the nineteenth century is read by those who can form truer estimates because distance will give a juster sense of proportion, the name of the woman who has just passed out from her field of work in this world will remain as one of those who moulded the history of our time not only in America, but throughout the world. There is no other life to-day that could be so widely mourned, except the Queen of England, and the grief that will come to thousands of hearts when she has left us will be one less personal in character than the bereavement that has fallen upon tens of thousands of men and women all the world over. When the news of Frances Willard's death was announced in the great city of London, no other name coming to us across the Atlantic would have been so widely known or so dearly loved. English newspapers are not as a rule enthusiastic, more especially about celebrities of other nationalities; but there has not been one single paper that has not recorded in its columns the life work of Frances Willard and the irreparable gap that she has left in the ranks of philanthropists.

It should be the pride of America that no other country could have produced her and no other age understood her, but it will be for future generations to realize what her life has meant

to humanity. It is not because Frances Willard toiled for twenty years in the temperance cause that she is famous, not because she gathered round her an association of women more fully organized and with probably a stronger *esprit de corps* than any other woman's society in the world; but rather because she was a woman who saw ahead of her time, who realized that the evils that were round her must be grappled with by an entirely new conception of woman's responsibility to the world. She has discovered that legislative results were not worth the paper they were written on unless the same moral forces that had succeeded in obtaining them had also a voice in choosing the executive that was to carry them into effect. She realized that the religious feeling of a country was of little use unless it permeated its whole executive life, and that the divorce that has existed so long between the Church, in the widest, truest sense of the word, the government of nations and the framing of the laws, was wholly disastrous to the best interests of any people. In order to endeavor to educate the coming race she did not set about a system of reform that meant a sweeping down of all existing barriers, a destruction of all that is, in order to make room for that which was to be; but she realized that, to effect great reforms, it is the home circle that must be first touched with a deep sense of responsibility for that wider circle beyond, which we call the nation. "God in government" was the motto of all the public work she did. The Sermon on the Mount was to her the Christian decalogue by which the world was to be governed, and if she was visionary and idealistic she resembled in this only the great Founder of Christianity, who has set the highest before us in order that we might ever strive after the noblest and the best.

It is a pride to us in England to know that Frances Willard's ancestors were brave yeomen of the county of Kent; and in the little village church of Horsmonden, amid the green fields and the hop gardens of that sunny spot, are still to be seen the records in crabbed handwriting on yellow parchment of the Willard family, before they left the mother-land to seek "a church without a bishop and a state without a king."

The early training of the girl who was destined to do so great a work is perhaps accountable for much of the freshness and originality which marked her in after life. Born in the State of

New York, when still quite a child her father and mother moved to a farm in Wisconsin, where they lived from her seventh to her nineteenth year; and there, surrounded by broad, rolling plains and streams and forests, the child grew among the birds and the flowers, and the memories of that happy childhood remained fresh and bright with her through after years of toil and the saddening influences that must surround a reformer's life. It was my good fortune to meet Mrs. Willard during the first visit I paid to America, and I have seldom been so impressed by the dignity of any woman. It would have been impossible in her presence to say an irreverent word of anyone, for humanity to her was sacred; and she seemed to live with such high ideals that to her the spirit of Emerson's words was an ever-present reality:

"Oh make me beautiful within,
And may mine eyes the good behold
In everything save sin."

I fully realized the influence that this mother must have had upon her daughter, and Miss Willard has often told me of the unsparing pains that she gave to her children's education, the careful training, the refining influence, and the enthusiasm for right which she constantly brought to bear upon the children whom she loved so well. The early education that Frances Willard received was one that had been well thought out: the best English poetry, the biographies of great men, the classics of history and of religion formed the library which the eager spirit constantly devoured. All novels, however, were excluded, and it was not until in early girlhood she went to spend a few days with a friend that to Frances was opened a new world in the perusal of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*. "I read them all in feverish haste," she said, "closing with *Villette*, in the midst of which I was on a lovely summer evening just before twilight, when a long shadow fell across the threshold where I was sitting and unconscious of everything about me, my father's tall form bent over me. He took the book from my hand, and as he saw the flush on my cheeks his brow was clouded. 'Never let my daughter see that book again, please, Madam,' he said to the lady of the house, who not knowing his rules had hardly noted my proceedings. The book was taken from me, and to this day I have never finished reading *Villette*."

Of the happy, holy days spent in that free country life Miss

Willard has spoken constantly, and I have rarely heard her address any large audience without in some way reverting to those blessed times of childhood which gave her an enthusiasm for nature and a deep understanding of the meaning of joy. The love of an outdoor life remained with her even though she had to sacrifice her inclinations (as indeed she sacrificed them continually) on the altar of her work ; but as I write I can see her now two years ago in the pleasant lanes on the sea's coast of Norfolk, and I can hear her saying, as we sat under the sweet, cool hedges, how beautiful the world was, and as she softly stroked the little flowers she would continually repeat, "Earth with her thousand voices praises God." Miss Willard's early career is too well known in America to make it necessary for me to reiterate it in this slight sketch. Her early life was given to teaching, beginning with a public school on an Illinois prairie and ending as president of the Woman's College at Evanston and professor in the University.

In 1862 came the first break in the home circle, when her sister Mary was called home ; and she has given the simple, touching details of this gentle life in her charming book entitled *Nineteen Beautiful Years*. Her sister's last words to her were the inspiration of her life. "Tell everybody to be good ;" and surely no message was more faithfully carried out, for it has been the life work of the one who was left for a while, and who has now joined the home circle in the Land of Light. In 1874 Miss Willard resigned her office as Dean of the Woman's College, and, as she says of this period, "made the greatest sacrifice her life had known or ever can know." She describes in her journal how, although overwhelmed with grief at the thought of leaving the work she loved so well, she had been forced to send in her resignation because she could not but be true to her principles. The last night before she laid down her duties, in an agony of tears she pitied herself as many a young spirit had done before. She says : "I tried so hard and meant so well. At last everything grew still and sweet and holy, while far into the night the deep June sky bent over me with a beauty that was akin to tenderness. The storm of my soul ebbed away slowly and the sobs ceased ; as dies the wave along the shore, so died away for evermore my sorrow to lose the beautiful college that my heart had loved as other women's hearts love their sweet and

sacred homes. In the long hours that followed, the peace that passeth understanding settled down upon my soul. God was revealed to me as a great brooding Motherly Spirit, and all of us who tried to carry on the University while He carried on the Universe seemed like little boys and girls who meant well but who didn't always understand each other. The figure was of children playing in a nursery, and one little boy had more vigor than the rest of us, and naturally wanted us to play his way, while a little girl whom I thought I could identify said, 'No, my way is best!' Then a deep voice declared, 'This is the interpretation—good to forgive, best to forget.' And then the happiness that mocketh speech flowed, like the blessed tranquil river of dear old Forest Home, all through my soul, and overflowed its banks with quiet, happy tears."

In 1873-4 there had swept over America an inspiration for temperance work which has since been known as the Woman's Crusade. While still Dean of the College, Miss Willard had felt the enthusiasm of this movement, and when she resigned the presidency she threw herself heart and soul into the crusade. In vain her wise counsellors pointed out to her that, as she was dependent upon her own exertions for her current needs and temperance work pays least of all work, therefore she could not afford to take it up; that she had made for herself a successful field in higher education, and that it was simply madness for her to throw away her gifts upon a cause to which neither fame nor money was attached. Her heart had gone out after the movement; in her ears rang the old home songs which sounded so strangely in the bars of the saloons. The pathos of the women's prayers had found an echo in her soul; the baptism of a great call was upon her, and she determined to throw in her lot with the band of reformers. And so her life changed and instead of peace, she says, "I was to participate in war; instead of the sweetness of home I was to become a wanderer on the face of the earth; instead of a student in libraries, I was to frequent public halls and railway cars; instead of the company of scholarly and cultured men I was to see the dregs of the saloon, the gambling house and haunt of shame. Hence I have felt that great promotion came to me when I was counted worthy to be a worker in the organized crusade for God and Home and Every Land."

The opening way was not an easy one; it was filled with hard-

ship and privation, but all seemed trivial to the eager spirit who desired only to suffer something worthy of a disciple for humanity's sweet sake. Speaking of this time in her life later, she says : "I have never known a more lovely period. I dwelt in the spirit ; the world had nothing to give and nothing to take away." Miss Willard realized, however, that her mother was dependent upon her exertions, and it was therefore necessary that her work should be in some way remunerated, and consequently she accepted the post of Corresponding Secretary for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and shortly afterward was appointed president of the society, a work which she carried on until her death. And what has this work meant? Unceasing toil for twenty years. Only by those who have shared her labor was her power of work fully realized ; the long days of writing on the cars, the immense audiences to meet at night, the endless journeys resumed the next day, the women to interview, the details to arrange, the hands to shake, the difficulties to smooth away, the disputes to settle—it was one unceasing round of arduous toil ; and yet I have never heard her murmur, never known her discontented ; but the sweet, bright, cheery spirit forged ahead doing what there was to hand, meeting the heaviness of it all with a buoyancy born of indomitable optimism and untiring faith in humanity. The impression produced upon my mind when I first heard Frances Willard address one of the annual conventions of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in 1891 will never be effaced. The charm of her speech, like her own character, consisted in its many sidedness, its eloquence, its pathos, its humor and above all its humanness, its complete understanding of the lives and necessities of others. She was as some master musician who is able to sweep all chords and yet continually recur to a melody tender and restful and sweet. She was so womanly in her strength, so joyous in her earnestness, and withal so supremely spiritual, that she seemed at all times as one who dwelt apart, and indeed to most of us who mourn her to-day, the words that have been constantly on our lips are these : "We shall not see her like again." It is unnecessary for me to dwell upon the breadth of the work that she has accomplished. She has done far more than build a vast temperance organization the world over. It is true that her conception has bound the women of all lands in one great society ; that her enthusiasm has fired missionaries to

start out round the world carrying with them their gospel of a pure life and a protected home; that hundreds of men and women are to-day engaged in philanthropic work who never realized their responsibility until they met her; that armies of children are enlisted in the great league for reform who will grow up to be the home guard of America's best interests: but she did more than all this—she taught the world that woman loses none of her best attributes, her gentlest influence, her strongest hold upon the affections of husband or children, neglects none of the sweet home ways, because she realizes that life holds for her responsibilities to humanity which she dare not ignore.

The essential spirit of the teaching of Frances Willard breathed in almost the last words she ever spoke before she crossed the dark river that separates us from the world of life. Her dear and constant companion, Anna Gordon, had been singing to her the old home hymn she loved so well,

“Gently, Lord, oh gently lead us,”

and when she came to the words, “If I awake among the blest,” she turned to her and said, “No, Anna, not ‘I,’ don’t sing it ‘I’; sing ‘we’; Christianity is ‘we,’ not ‘I’; it is our Father. Christianity is ‘we.’” That was the keynote of her life. “I can have no happiness when others sorrow and I could help to make them glad; I can have no joy when little children are ignorant of a child’s heritage of joy. I cannot sit at ease while other lives are held in the clasp of sin and souls are bowed in agony of shame. It is *our* Father, for He loves them all, and in Him I love them too.” It was this spirit that sent her forth upon her mission; it was in this spirit that she worked in failing health and the constant weariness of growing weakness until “she laid down her life for her brethren.”

We do not forget in England that to no other philanthropist did we ever give so warm a welcome. The great meeting at Exeter Hall that was held in her honor was probably the most representative gathering that has ever assembled to greet any great man or woman on that historic platform; and we are glad to know that we laid laurels at her feet while yet the homage could bring a smile to her face and the words of praise could still rejoice her heart. And now she has gone, and to us she has left her legacy of work—work that we dare not neglect, for still we know that “Eyes do regard us in Eternity’s stillness,” and we have

learned our lesson from that womanly spirit whose words of sweet reasonableness have been spoken so often, whose many-sided arguments and loving pleas we will yet prove have not been "love's labor lost." Such lives are never ended, for their spirit lives on in the lives of others. Frances Willard felt that a woman owed it to all other women to live as bravely, as helpfully, and as grandly as she could.

There is an old plantation melody, the refrain of which runs :

"Maybe the Lord will be glad of me,
Maybe the Lord will be glad of me,
In Heaven He'll rejoice,"

and the words and the music, she says, "touched a chord very far down in my heart, and I have hummed the strange old snatch of pathos to myself times without number at twilight on the cars after a hard day's work with book and pen." And who can doubt that He who has sent some "apostles, some prophets," was glad of her who has been a ministering spirit to the needs of many. "If the story of my life," she has said, "has any force at all, I pray that it may help to hasten the coming of Christ's Kingdom, whose visible token is universal brotherhood; the blessed time drawing nearer to us every day, when in the most practical sense and by the very constitution of society and government, all men's weal shall be each man's care."

ISABEL SOMERSET.